

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND HEALTH OF OLDER PEOPLE IN SPAIN

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The beneficial effects of social relations and family networks have been identified in several studies on health of elderly people. Contact with children or relatives, social interaction with friends and participation in social activities is associated with good physical and mental health in older people.

This study aims at assess the linkages between social networks and health of older people in Spain. In Spain, as in other Southern European societies, the family rather than the welfare state plays the major role in reducing uncertainty during difficult periods in the life course: the phase of education, entry into the labour market, family formation and family dissolution, old age, illness or disability. However, Spanish society is going through rapid changes. For instance, women's rapid advancement in education and labour force participation, weakening family networks and changes in family-related behaviour.

The analysis will be based on data from the 2004 'Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe' (SHARE). SHARE is a cross-national survey which includes questions on health, socio-economic status and social and family networks of people over 50 in Europe. I will focus on health and social networks among persons aged 65 and over in Spain.

I will first present a description of the family support, social activities and family contacts of people over 65 in Spain. Then, I will assess the linkages between social networks and health.

Social networks (%) among persons aged 65 and over in Spain, 2004.

	Male				Female			
	Total	65-74	75-84	>85	Total	65-74	75-84	>85
Marital status								
Single	4,0	4,1	3,1	6,9	5,3	3,9	7,3	6,0
Married	59,6	60,9	62,7	37,9	42,5	56,4	32,8	8,0
Registered Partnership	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,2	0,0	0,0
Separated	0,3	0,0	0,9	0,0	0,8	1,1	0,6	0,0
Divorced	0,4	0,7	0,0	0,0	0,5	0,4	0,6	0,0
Widowed	7,6	5,2	8,0	24,1	32,5	20,6	39,7	65,0
Number of children								
0	6,2	5,7	7,1	6,9	9,5	7,7	12,0	10,0
1	5,9	6,3	4,0	10,3	10,6	9,0	10,4	19,0
2	15,5	15,1	16,4	15,5	17,6	17,8	18,6	13,0
>2	24,8	22,9	26,7	32,8	27,1	27,9	24,0	33,0
Frequency of contact to most contacted child								
Dialy	27,1	26,4	28,0	29,3	31,7	33,9	28,7	31,0
Weekly	14,3	13,3	16,0	19,0	15,3	16,3	14,5	17,0
Less often	2,0	1,5	2,2	5,2	2,5	1,5	3,5	4,0
Never	0,1	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,6	0,2	0,9	0,1
Proximity to nearest living child								
Same household	15,8	13,8	16,9	27,6	22,4	19,7	21,8	37,0
1-25 km.	27,3	27,1	27,6	27,6	29,0	32,0	26,8	22,0
>25 km.	3,0	3,3	2,2	3,4	3,5	2,8	3,8	6,0
Frequency of grandchildren care								
Dialy	8,5	10,5	6,2	1,7	9,3	15,0	3,2	2,0
Weekly	5,0	6,1	3,6	1,7	5,5	7,7	4,1	0,0
Less often	5,7	7,4	3,6	0,0	7,4	10,5	4,4	2,0
Never	37,2	30,3	47,1	53,4	40,5	32,8	46,7	57,0

Source: SHARE (2004).